

Mount Tamalpais State Park



Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at **(415) 388-2070**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact interp@parks.ca.gov.

CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

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SaveTheRedwoods.org/csp

Mount Tamalpais State Park

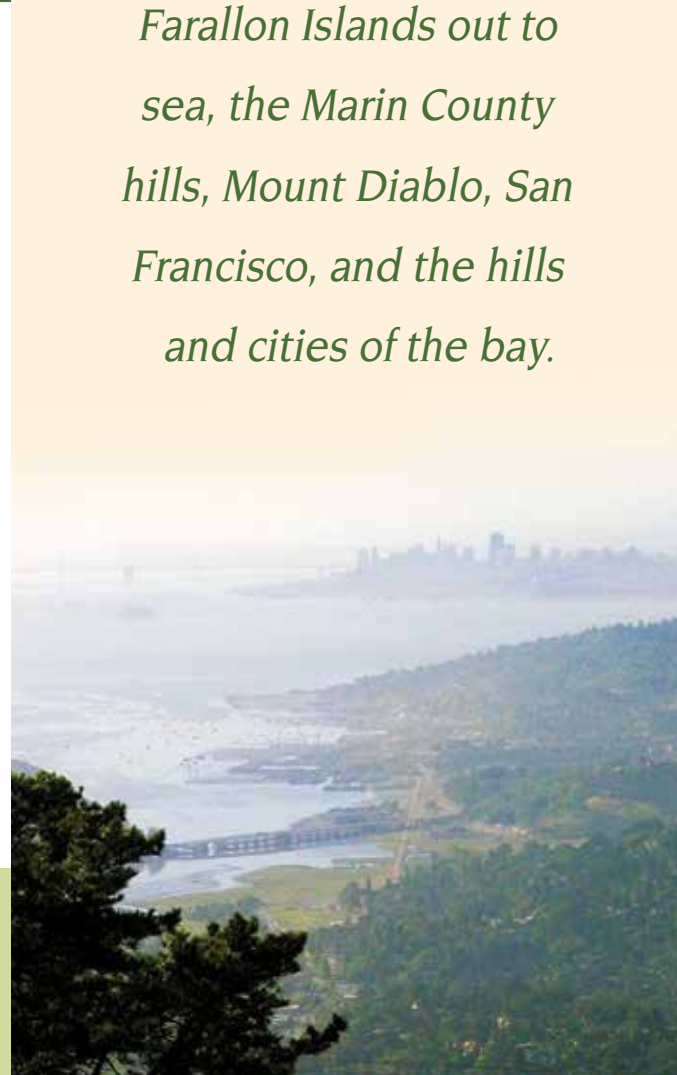
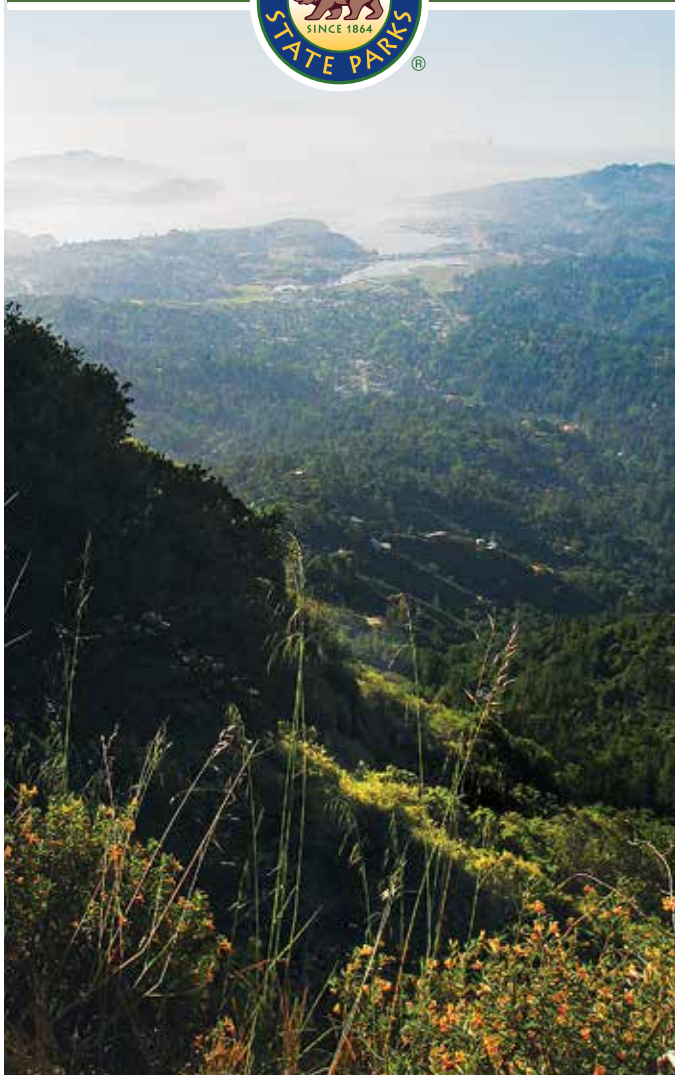
801 Panoramic Highway, Mill Valley, CA 94941

(415) 388-2070 • www.parks.ca.gov/mttamalpais

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*The panorama from
the 2,571-foot peak
is breathtaking.*

*On a clear day, view the
Farallon Islands out to
sea, the Marin County
hills, Mount Diablo, San
Francisco, and the hills
and cities of the bay.*



North of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, Mount Tamalpais State Park rises majestically from the heart of Marin County. Mount Tamalpais captures our attention with its sweeping hillsides cloaked with chaparral-covered ridges, grasslands and oak woodlands. Deep canyons filled with solemn redwood groves intersect these ridges and slopes to create a diverse environment for a wide array of plant and animal species.

The breathtaking panorama from Mount Tamalpais's 2,571-foot peak includes the Farallon Islands 25 miles out to sea, the Marin County hills, San Francisco Bay, the East Bay and Mount Diablo.

Spring and summer temperatures are warm, with average highs in the 70s and 80s. Fall and winter can be cool, with temperatures in the 50s; fog is common.

CULTURAL HISTORY

Native People

The Coast Miwok lived on or near Mount Tamalpais, staying near water sources throughout present-day Marin County. These Native Californians hunted small animals and deer, collected acorns, and gathered flora, marsh plants and shellfish. They made baskets and clamshell disk beads, trading them for locally unobtainable resources, such as high-grade obsidian from Lake County tribes. The Coast Miwok had a rich culture and a complex and intricate language. However, their way of life changed soon after the arrival of Europeans.

In 1770 two explorers, Captain Pedro Fages and Father Juan Crespí, named the mountain *La Sierra de Nuestro Padre de San Francisco*. This was later changed to the Miwok word *tamalpais* (tam-al-pie-us), which, roughly translated, means “bay mountain” or “coast mountain.”

Mount Tamalpais Scenic Railway

Residents of San Francisco, whose population exploded after the 1848 gold discovery, used Mount Tamalpais for recreational purposes. Trails were developed, and a wagon road was built to the top of the mountain in 1884.

The Mount Tamalpais Scenic Railway, completed in 1896, carried visitors to the mountaintop and the Summit Tavern, a hotel and restaurant. The slope from Mill Valley to the summit was so steep that the railroad had to negotiate 281 curves, equivalent to 42 complete circles, billing itself as the “Crookedest Railroad in the World.” In the section known as the “Double Bow Knot,” the track paralleled itself five times within 200 yards. In 1907 the “gravity car” was designed to transport visitors from the top of the mountain to the redwood-filled canyon of Muir Woods. Requiring only gravity and a brake, open-air rail cars carried passengers down the mountain to Muir Woods at an exhilarating 12 mph. The railroad and gravity cars allowed sightseers to travel from Mill Valley to the summit, down to the Woods, and back to Mill Valley.

The Scenic Railway's famous gravity cars were popular until the advent of the automobile and the construction of

Ridgecrest Boulevard in 1925. A gravity car replica is displayed at the Gravity Car Barn on East Peak.

Conservation Efforts

Over the years, millions have flocked to the mountain, affectionately called “Mount Tam,” to relish the spectacular views and hike its trails. Generations of Mount Tam enthusiasts have worked hard to protect the mountain and keep it open to the public. The oldest of these citizen groups is the Tamalpais Conservation Club, organized in 1912. In 1928 William Kent, an ardent Marin County conservationist, and his wife donated 200 acres of land in Steep Ravine to help create Mount Tamalpais State Park. The park was later enlarged through the efforts of several hiking clubs, led by the Tamalpais Conservation Club. These organizations orchestrated a grassroots campaign to purchase additional land for the state park.



Gravity car on Mount Tam's Scenic Railway, ca. 1900

THE STATE PARK TODAY

Now one of the oldest and most popular units of the California State Park System, the park has grown to 6,300 acres. Completely surrounding Muir Woods National Monument, the park is bordered by Marin Municipal Water District land on the north and by the Golden Gate National Recreation Area on the northwest and south.

NATURAL HISTORY

Geology

Many people think the 2,571-foot peak is the remnant of an extinct volcano. However, geologists believe that Mount Tamalpais was created due to its location near the San Andreas Fault, one of the world's most active faults. Over time, the mountain has risen from the earth's crust, while erosion has left only solid rock exposed in the highest peaks and ridges.

Common rock types here are graywacke (sandstone), shale, greenstone, chert, quartz tourmaline and the easily identified green serpentine, California's official state rock.

Plant Life

The varied topography and soils of the park support a tremendous diversity of plant life. More than 750 plant species can be found in the park. Hikers pass through open grassland, chaparral and oak-covered knolls, or they descend through dense stands of Douglas-fir and California laurel into deep, fern- and redwood-filled canyons.

In spring the slopes of Mount Tam come alive with the vibrant colors of wildflowers. Hillsides are sprinkled with California poppies, lupines, Douglas irises, goldfields and shooting stars. Spotted coralroot, fetid

adder's tongue and Pacific trillium are among the plants that hide in the deep shade of the forest.

The Redwood Forest

Mount Tam's legendary Steep Ravine Trail leads hikers along Webb Creek through a stand of tall redwood trees. The sound of rushing water prepares visitors for the fragrance of damp earth and the sight of ferns along the creek's banks. The redwoods form a canopy above the water cascading over the rocks. Alongside the cascade, hikers must climb a steep ladder to return to the beginning of this beautiful trail.

Although the park can be foggy year round, some scientists are concerned that increased temperatures and decreased fog due to climate change may threaten the survival of the coast redwoods environment.



Animal Life

Raccoons, gray foxes, squirrels, bobcats, coyotes, black-tailed deer and mountain lions sometimes roam the slopes. Bears and elk once wandered the land, but they vanished as a result of hunting and ranching before the park was established.

Birdwatchers can view more than 150 species of birds within or very near the park. Red-tailed hawks, northern harriers and turkey vultures soar over the open grasslands by day, while the sounds of great horned, spotted, barn and screech owls fill the night. The hollow drilling of pileated, acorn, and hairy woodpeckers adds to the forest sounds. Along the coastline, there are numerous oceanic and intertidal birds to identify.



Red-tailed hawk

RECREATION

Hiking—Hikers enjoy more than 60 miles of park trails, connecting to a 200-mile trail system over land managed by the Marin Municipal Water District and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Cycling—Road bikers are challenged by the infamous Seven Sisters climb and the twisting road to the top. Mountain bikers can enjoy the Coast View and Dias Ridge multi-use trails as well as park fire roads.

Day Use—Bootjack, on Panoramic Highway east of Pantoll, has picnic tables for up to 50 people, stoves, water and flush toilets.

East Peak summit has picnic tables, an accessible restroom and a visitor center staffed on weekends.



Spectacular views of the San Francisco Bay area can be seen from the Verna Dunshee Trail near East Peak.

Mountain Theater—The 3,750-seat Mountain Theater, officially named the Cushing Memorial Amphitheatre, was built of natural stone in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps at Steep Ravine. Each spring since 1913, the Mountain Play Association theatrical company has presented outdoor productions of Broadway musicals. For dates and reservations of Mountain Theater performances, contact the Mountain Play Association at (415) 383-1100.

To hold special events in the park, see the park event application at www.parks.ca.gov.

Camping—Bootjack and Pantoll campgrounds, on Panoramic Highway, each have 15 first-come, first-served sites about 100 yards from the parking area. Both campsites offer drinking water, firewood and restrooms with flush toilets. There are no showers.

Rocky Point/Steep Ravine Environmental Campground, on a marine terrace one mile south of Stinson Beach, has seven primitive sites and nine rustic cabins. Each cabin has a small wood stove, picnic table, sleeping platforms and an outdoor barbecue, but no

running water. Restrooms and water faucets are nearby. Reservations are required.

The Alice Eastwood Group Camp, located on the Panoramic Highway near the Mountain Home Inn, has two sites for organized groups of 25 to 50 people. Both sites have tables, grills and a large tent spot.

Frank Valley Group Horse Camp, on Muir Woods Road about one mile north of Hwy. 1 at Muir Beach, has tables, fire rings, drinking water, pit toilets, horse troughs and corrals for up to 12 horses.

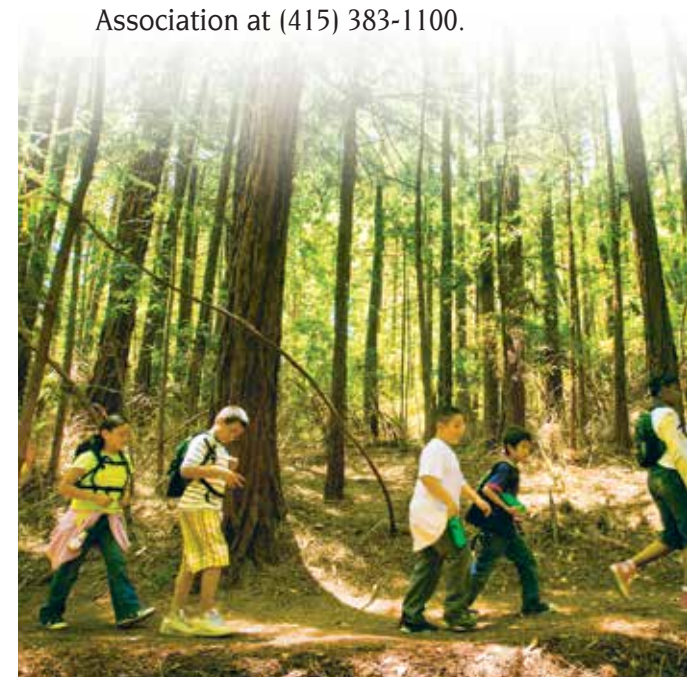
Visit www.parks.ca.gov/mttamalpais or call (800) 444-7275 for campground and cabin reservation information. Reservations may be made seven months in advance.

INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

At East Peak, a visitor center and recreated Gravity Car Barn are open as volunteer staffing allows. At the Mountain Theater, free astronomy programs with telescope viewings take place on select Saturday nights April through October. Elsewhere on the mountain, guided hikes are offered year round. Visit www.parks.ca.gov/mttamalpais or www.friendsofmonttam.org for details and links to interpretive programs and events, such as free guided weekend and moonlight hikes. Inquire at the Pantoll Ranger Kiosk about self-guided hikes and ranger-led programs for schools and other groups.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

- The accessible half-mile Verna Dunshee Trail at East Peak has fantastic bay views. Accessible tables, restrooms and drinking fountains are nearby.
- Spectacular vistas may also be seen from an accessible .4-mile portion of the Old Mine Trail from Pantoll Station and .25 miles of the McKennan Trail.
- Pantoll and Bootjack each have accessible camping, restrooms and parking.
- Cabin #1 and environmental campsite #7 at Steep Ravine are accessible.
- The Mountain Theater has a wheelchair platform on the right side of the theater.
- The Mountain Play Association offers signed performances and descriptive services during the first three play performances each season. For more information, call the Mountain Play Association at (415) 383-1100.



Mount Tamalpais State Park



Legend

- Major Road
- Paved Road
- Fire Road: Hiking, Horse and Bicycle
- Trail: Hiking
- Trail: Hiking and Horse
- Trail: Hiking, Horse and Bicycle
- Accessible Trail (Hiking Only)
- Accessible Feature
- Bridge
- Campground
- Drinking Water
- Environmental Campground
- Exhibit
- Group Campground
- Horse Campground
- Locked Gate
- Parking
- Picnic Area
- Ranger Station
- Restrooms
- Spring
- Viewpoint



PLEASE REMEMBER

- The park is open from 7 a.m. to sunset.
- All natural and cultural park resources are protected by law and must not be disturbed or removed.
- Camping and fires are permitted only in designated areas.
- Except for service animals, leashed dogs are allowed only on paved roads in developed areas, family campgrounds and picnic areas. Dogs must be confined to a vehicle or tent at night.
- Horses and bicycles are allowed only on fire roads and posted hiking trails.
- Be alert for poison oak, rattlesnakes, mountain lions and ticks.
- Bus transit serves the park. Visit www.marintransit.org or call 511 or (415) 526-3239 for schedules and stops.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Angel Island State Park**
In San Francisco Bay
Ferries from Tiburon/Vallejo/San Francisco
(415) 435-5390
- China Camp State Park**
Four miles east of San Rafael on San Pedro Road
(415) 456-0766
- Samuel P. Taylor State Park**
15 miles west of San Rafael on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard
(415) 488-9897

This park is supported in part through the Friends of Mt. Tam
P.O. Box 7064, Corte Madera, CA 94976
(415) 258-2410 • www.friendsofmontamalpais.org